

693.c.8.

CHEAP RELIGIOUS TRACTS. 2

No. I.

AN

ADDRESS to CHRISTIANS,

RECOMMENDING THE
DISTRIBUTION OF CHEAP RELIGIOUS TRACTS.

Entered at Stationer's Hall.

WHEN Jesus was on earth, he went about doing good. Can he claim the name of a disciple who does not imitate the example of the master? Are we not in this respect peculiarly called on to have the same mind in us, which was also in Christ Jesus? A spirit of active benevolence is one of the distinguishing features of christianity. *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*, is a precept enjoined by the authority and illustrated and enforced by the example of the Redeemer, with an energy which nothing but the blindness and obduracy of human depravity could resist. Where the gospel has its full influence, it calls forth into exertion all the powers of the soul; and produces the most tender concern for the happiness of mankind. This concern does not evaporate in unavailing pity; but rouses to action; and girding itself for service, inquires, "What can be done toward banishing human misery, and making man happy?" While the temporal necessities of the poor and the afflicted are affectionately enquired into and relieved, the christian enlightened from above to view the state of man, as an immortal being, is most concerned for the salvation of the soul, and his eternal blessedness. This is the grand object he is called to pursue with seven-fold ardour; and it is an object so vast, that if we saw all its excellence

A

and

and all its importance, it would cover us with shame and confusion for our past negligence, and pierce us to the heart to recollect so many precious opportunities of usefulness, which now alas! are irrecoverably lost.—We have all need to go again, and sit down at the feet of Jesus, and hear him discourse of the one thing needful. We have all need to go and stand at the foot of the cross, and look up, and see in the death of Jesus the value of immortal souls; and learn thence the proper employment of beings destined for eternity. If Jesus condescend to teach us, and open our eyes to see the state and worth of souls, we shall, with eager desire to become instruments of their salvation, cry out in tender pity, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do!*

This is the age of ingenuity. How many discoveries useful to individuals and to society have been made since we first trod the stage of life, and took our part in the *drama* of human affairs. But is there an object in which the ingenuity of the mind should be so ardently employed as in searching for the best way, and the various means of doing good to the souls of men? Would it not be to the most humiliating disgrace of christians, if the mechanic, the manufacturer, the artist, and the philosopher were all actively employed with the utmost stretch of thought to find out what may be useful in their peculiar art or science, while the professed disciples of Jesus employ no energies, nor exert the vigour of their souls in their proper department—the cause of their blessed master? Let us not be excelled by any; and if possible let the maxim, “That the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light,” become inapplicable to us. Whatever may be said as to past negligence, let it now appear that we are busied in discovering every way of access for divine truth into the human heart; and that we are resolved to employ every means we can think of as conducive to that end.

Among

Among many others, none of which should be neglected, there is one which merits peculiar notice, and which we would earnestly recommend to the serious attention of the disciples of Jesus, as calculated to be of eminent and extensive benefit: namely,
THE DISTRIBUTION OF RELIGIOUS TRACTS.

To this subject many zealous followers of the Redeemer, who are a blessing to the generation in which they live, have never turned their thoughts; and at first sight may not perceive its great utility: but when they have examined it maturely, they will rejoice to find that there remains one method of doing good, which they never used, and which they will now have the pleasure to employ.

The advantages which may be expected to result from the distribution of religious tracts are indeed so many and so great, that, where duly weighed, it is to be hoped, they will have a powerful influence on the mind of every lover of Jesus and of souls. The following will be readily allowed, and carry with them their own recommendation.

It is a method *which is likely to do good*. Is not divine truth the grand instrument, of which God makes use for the conversion of sinners, and for the edification and comfort of saints, till they come, in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. All the wonders of faith, holiness and patience which christians have displayed, have been wrought by the influence of truth upon the soul. In the promulgation of truth by preaching, which was God's first way of making the gospel known, there are assuredly some peculiar advantages. But in doing it by writing, there are advantages also: and it has this recommendation, that it is God's chief way of making himself known to the human race from age to age, and of presenting truth to the minds of men from day to day in every land, where the revelation of his will is known.

Are there not thousands and tens of thousands now in glory, whose first impressions of religion, as well as their future improvement, have been made by reading: and is it not calculated to be as useful now as ever?—What is a religious tract, but a select portion of divine truth designed and adapted to make the reader wise unto salvation?

It is *an easy way of doing good*. Every one has not the talent of talking to those he meets with, especially to strangers, on subjects of religion. They who possess it, cannot see what should hinder any body from conversing about eternal things, as readily as they do. But there are many pious people who find it extremely difficult to speak for God, and for the salvation of their fellow creatures. Some have a diffidence which they cannot overcome. They know they ought to warn sinners of their danger; but how to do it they cannot tell. Here is a method by which it may be done with ease. Choose from your collection of tracts what you think is suited to the person to whom you wish to speak. It is not hard to say, "My friend, read that, and tell me what you think of it." You have given him a wise, faithful and serious counsel, which, accompanied with your prayers, (and these should never be omitted when you give a tract) may, by the blessing of heaven, be made useful to his soul. You may, in consequence of this, afterwards have an opportunity of conversing with him on the subject. At any rate, you have conveyed divine truth to the door of his mind.

It is *a cheap way* of diffusing the knowledge of religion. The tracts are in general small. They may be had at a very reasonable rate: and the person who will devote a small sum annually for this purpose may convey to many hundred people in the course of a year, the knowledge of the way of salvation by a crucified Redeemer. A farthing, a halfpenny, or perhaps a penny, which would
furnish

furnish but a scanty relief to the bodily wants of the poor and the destitute, will purchase a religious tract, plainly and affectionately directing the sinner to the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world. None will grudge the pittance, or complain that this is a dear way of doing good to the souls of men. It will be indeed difficult to say, in what other way there is a probability of so much good being done with so small a sum.

It is *not so likely to give offence* as some other methods of doing good. When we speak to a neighbour or a stranger on divine things, he is apt to consider us as assuming the place of a master, and setting up for his superior in knowledge and goodness. Pride instantly takes the alarm. He scorns to be dictated to, as he conceives it. His heart is steeled against counsel, and a tart answer, expressive of disdain, is all the fruit of our labour. But when a little tract is put into his hands, the teacher is not the giver of the book ; but a third person, an absent *lettered sage*. It is read apart from him who gave it. The idea of inferiority, which was so mortifying, is removed. There is not that enmity against the paper and print, which was raised by the presence and living voice of the instructor ; and he listens with greater candour and patience. This method has more the appearance of a person's teaching himself, than when he is spoken to by another, and is on that account more agreeable to his feelings, and the truth is more readily received. Some are accessible in no other way.

It is *more extensive in its use* than any other method of conveying religious knowledge which a private christian can employ. Personal instruction must, from the time it requires, be limited to few comparatively. A religious tract contains a plain, serious and striking lecture on the salvation of the soul. It would require half an hour to deliver its contents ; and they might slip out of the memory, and could not afterwards be recalled. But it is given away in an
A 3
instant

instant : it may be perused and re-perused at pleasure; and the truth may thus flow through a great variety of channels. An intimate and respected friend has for some time endeavoured to do good in this way: and what can be done, may be learnt from his practice. He always keeps by him a store of tracts of different kinds, and suited to different characters; and he pays particular attention to character in the distribution. He gives them to his poor neighbours, and to people who call at his house. When he walks out, he tries to get into conversation with those he meets, and puts a tract into their hands. He gives them to children to read to their parents. When he travels, religious tracts are a necessary part of his baggage. If he see a person walking along the road, who is likely to listen to instruction, he reaches him a tract. At every turnpike he hands the gate-keeper one; and wishes him God's blessing with it. When he comes to an inn, he puts a tract into the hands of the waiter, the servant-maid, and the hostler; the driver never fails to have two or three. If he saunter about the town, he looks into the habitations of the poor, and talks kindly to them, and gives the parents or the children one or two of his little books, with an affectionate wish that God may bless them. When he stops at a friend's house, he presents them to the children and servants. Besides these personal distributions, he sends parcels of his tracts to ministers of his acquaintance, and other friends in the country, for them to distribute in a similar manner. When it is considered, that a tract given by a friend recommends it to an attentive perusal; and when by a stranger, excites curiosity to see what it contains; and that each of these tracts may be read not only by the person who receives it, but by four or five more who compose his household; and that it may be lent from one family to another; we may form some idea how extensively divine truth is disseminated by his means. What one person does,
others

others may do; and if every christian, according to his abilities and opportunities, were to exert himself in this manner, how many in the course of a year might learn the method of salvation by Christ, and be excited to seek after it under the preaching of the gospel, who in all probability would not have heard of it in any other way!

Nor in the enumeration of advantages, should it be omitted, that the distribution of religious tracts *forms an excellent accompaniment to other means of doing good.* If in the intercourse of life you meet with a person who appears teachable and desirous of instruction, what can be more proper, after you have discoursed with him, than to say, "Here is a little book which will give you distinct information on the subject: Read it again and again, and pray to God for his blessing." When by conversation you have impressed a person with a sense of the importance of divine things, would it not conduce greatly to rivet the impression, if, at parting, when you observe him loth to leave you, a tract be put into his hands, with these words, "My friend, this will more fully explain what we have been talking of; it contains the truths of God." Should there fall in your way, a man distressed in mind, and enquiring with tears, "What must I do to be saved?" can your pious counsels be better followed up, than with a tract to read at home, directing the wounded soul to the blood of Jesus, which cleanseth from all sin? Has a person been awakened under the ministry of the word, and afterwards brings his complaints to the preacher, who with the tongue of the learned knows how to speak a word in season to him that is weary; would it not be a very proper method of dismissing the enquirer, to give him a tract which will, when he is at a distance from ordinances or pious friends, refresh his heart with the same precious truths which he felt so much adapted to his case? How beneficial the practice here recommended would

be in all these, and many other instances which might be adduced, must be obvious to every one concerned for the welfare of immortal souls.

In addition to these advantages and as a practical confirmation of them, *the happiest effects have resulted* from the practice recommended. Nothing has the weight of facts: to fair reasoning, therefore, it is of use to subjoin examples. If any should say, "I am not convinced by your arguments:" they cannot controvert matters of fact. Two instances came within the knowledge of an individual who is a warm advocate for the distribution of religious tracts, which he had from the lips of the persons themselves, and which he will briefly relate. The one is a young gentleman who had been in a situation peculiarly unfavourable to religion and humanity, who was living in profaneness and vice, and who discovered a peculiar enmity to real godliness, and could not bear, without testifying bitter indignation, the counsels and letters of pious friends. A relation of his being on a visit at the house where he lived, one evening put into his hand a religious tract, and begged the favour of him to read it. He took it up with him to his apartment; and before he went to rest, looked over the first page. It struck him there was something there he had never seen nor thought of before. He next day read the whole; and the happy consequence was a deep concern for the salvation of his soul, a discovery of the way of obtaining mercy, and an immediate application to Jesus for pardon, grace, and peace. He is now an eminently zealous christian, and is vigorously exerting himself to promote the knowledge of Christ in the neighbourhood where he resides. The tract which proved so useful is peculiarly excellent, and merits a place in every collection. It is *Vivian's three dialogues between a minister and one of his parishioners*. The other person had been a seaman in the navy. He was a sabbath-breaker, a drunkard, and a swearer; in short, a notorious sinner.

ner. His wife brought home, from the county hospital, a religious tract, which is given to those who go out recovered. He read it, and was convinced of his sinful ways. It led him immediately to attend on the preaching of the gospel, where he could hear the way pointed out by which a sinner can be saved : and there is every reason to conclude, from several years observation, that he is a true disciple of Jesus Christ. Let the worth of the soul be duly considered ; and what a reward is here for the labours of thousands ! If two examples fall within the personal acquaintance of one man, how many, may we not hope, will have reason to bless God through all eternity for this method of conveying religious knowledge ; especially when we take into the account, that numbers of persons have not the courage, nor the opportunity of making known in this life the benefit they have received. Heaven will present a thousand glorious instances of this nature to the astonishment and joy of faithful ministers, and of zealous christians, who have laboured to shed abroad the sweet savour of the Redeemer's name.

From the serious consideration of these things, accompanied with the divine blessing, which is earnestly implored to descend on every reader, may it not be hoped that there will not be one disciple of Jesus who follows the Lord fully, and who is desirous to be always abounding in the work of the Lord, but will be disposed henceforth to add this method of doing good, to those he has formerly employed ?

But perhaps he may enquire, " What tracts are most proper to be given away, and calculated to do most good, that I may procure them." This is a question of no small importance. For as it is with religious books, some are highly valuable, some are comparatively useless, and some are exceedingly hurtful ; so it is as to small tracts. Too much care cannot be taken, that they should all be excellent in their kind. Those who compose them should exert
their

their talents to the utmost; and those who give them away should carefully examine what are best worth their distribution. The following qualities should be sought for and are united in a good tract.

Pure truth. This flowing from the sacred fountain of the New Testament should run from beginning to end, uncontaminated with error, undisturbed with human systems; clear as crystal, like the river of life. There should be nothing in it of the *shibboleth* of a sect; nothing to recommend one denomination, or to throw odium on another; nothing of the acrimony of contending parties against those that differ from them: but pure good-natured christianity, in which all the followers of the Lamb, who are looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life, can unite with pleasure, as in one great common cause. Nor should any worldly scheme be interwoven with the truth; nor attempted to be concealed under its folds. Here should not be seen the slightest vestige of any carnal end, in any form, or for any purpose, however laudable some may think it; nothing but divine truth, unmingled, unadulterated, and pure as it came from heaven, fit for the whole human race to imbibe.

There should be *some account of the way of a sinner's salvation* in every tract. That they should be on different subjects is highly proper, and greatly conducive to their utility. But in all there should be interwoven the method of a sinner's recovery from guilt and misery by the atonement and grace of the Redeemer. So that if a person were to see but one, and never have an opportunity of meeting with another book, he might plainly perceive, that, in order to his salvation, he must be born again of the Spirit, and justified by faith in the obedience of Jesus unto death. A tract without this is very defective indeed.

It should be plain. Perspicuity here is, next to truth, the first quality of a good tract. If the rhetorician's rule, "That the meaning should be not only

only so plain that it may be understood, but so plain that it cannot possibly be misunderstood," call for the writer's observance in one instance more than another, it is here, where the mass of the readers is but little acquainted with divine things, and their minds unaccustomed to application; and who, therefore, need to have truth made clear as the light of day. The want of this quality is more than sufficient to exclude a tract from circulation.

It should be striking. The design is to engage the attention of those who have but little relish for divine things: and how difficult a matter that is when religion is the subject, those who are accustomed to address mankind on their most important interests, can fully testify. However good a tract may be, as to purity of doctrine, and perspicuity of style, if it be not so composed as to interest the reader in a more than ordinary degree, it is in danger of being thrown aside without a perusal. There is a way of representing divine truth which renders it striking, and makes it penetrate the mind, and arrest the attention. With this view, strong, pithy expressions, lively representations of truth and pathetic addresses, are here quite in point. For this quality should the liberal distributor of tracts diligently search.

It should be entertaining. A plain didactic essay on a religious subject may be read by a christian with much pleasure; but the persons for whom these tracts are chiefly designed, will fall asleep over it. This will not do: it is throwing money and labour away. There must be something to allure the listless to read, and this can only be done by blending entertainment with instruction. Where *narrative* can be made the medium of conveying truth, it is eagerly to be embraced, as it not only engages the attention, but also assists the memory, and makes a deeper impression on the heart. *Dialogue* is another way of rendering a tract entertaining. The conversation draws the reader insensibly along.
He

He is generally one of the speakers introduced: he finds his own sentiments and reasonings attacked and defended: he feels every argument that is adduced; and the subject fixes itself strongly and deeply in his mind. Where neither of these methods can be used, ingenuity will have recourse to various other ways of giving an agreeable relish to truth, and of seasoning it so as to whet the appetite of the reader.

It should be full of ideas. There are but few instances in which this quality can be dispensed with. It is but a small present, and therefore should be made as valuable as possible. Its value will rise in proportion to the number of precious truths which it contains. To ring a change upon two or three ideas is likely to be of little service: it is but a mere taste of food. But when every sentence contains something useful and something new, there is in a little tract an abundant meal of the bread of life. For this purpose, truth should be compressed. The motto of every tract should be, *Multum in parvo*: and if the foregoing qualities be attended to, there is no danger of compressing too much. In preaching it may be necessary to dilate more, and to spread out truth to a larger extent; but in a printed tract, that is not necessary: for it is one of the advantages of reading above hearing, that a person may go over any part of the subject again and again, till he fully comprehends it, and lays it up in his mind. One of the excellencies of sacred scripture is its fulness of truth, and yet what book is so plain? The more a tract imitates it in this respect, the more valuable, and the more useful, through the divine blessing, it is likely to prove.

What has been just hinted at before requires to be enlarged on, namely: that in a collection of tracts, besides those which are of common concern, there should be some adapted to *various situations and conditions*. General exhortations, men are too apt to consider as things with which they have no
imme-

immediate concern. When an address is particular and directed to a specified situation, it comes home to the man's bosom, who feels himself described: and it has a more powerful effect on his mind. In tracts, as in preaching therefore, the more particularly a subject can be brought close to an individual's case and feelings, the more useful it is likely to be. Hence the propriety and necessity of tracts for the young and for the aged, for the children of prosperity and of affliction, for careless and for awakened sinners, and for entering into the reasonings, excuses, temptations, duties, &c. &c. of each, and pointing out to them the way of the Lord. Hereby is presented to the judicious christian an opportunity of giving to every one his portion of spiritual food in due season.

That small religious tracts possessing these qualities must be highly valuable, and well suited to the important purpose of conveying divine instruction, will be readily acknowledged: but the difficulty is to find them.

To remove this difficulty and to provide an abundant supply of such as have been described that shall be always ready when called for, a SOCIETY has lately been instituted; and its object is to collect, compose, print and distribute small religious tracts, and to dispose of them to subscribers and purchasers on the lowest terms.

Here then is a favourable opportunity presented to every man, of doing good to the human race: and should it not be eagerly embraced? How loudly do the necessities of the world call for help and relief! There are millions in this highly favoured country as grossly ignorant of the way in which a sinner can be saved, as the idolaters of China: and how widely vice, wickedness, profaneness, irreligion and practical atheism prevail in every town and village, a person has but to open his eyes to see, and converse with men to hear. Viewing men in the light of immortal creatures, their case is truly
deplorable

deplorable. If the wicked "shall be turned into hell; and they that know not God and obey not the gospel, shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;" surely those who believe the scriptures should deeply feel for the misery of so many wicked creatures as we see every day around us; and be anxiously concerned by this means, as well as others, if possible, to pluck these brands out of the everlasting burnings.

Perhaps some may say, "I am endeavouring to be useful to my fellow creatures in many ways, I cannot in all." Many who read this address, are, without doubt, laying themselves out to do good to mankind; and every pious heart must rejoice in their benevolence. But would it not be well, O disciple of Jesus, to add this to the other means which you employ, and to enlarge your sphere of usefulness? Few things require less trouble, less expence, or less time. Rich christians may very extensively disseminate the knowledge of Christ in this way, both by their own distribution and by the assistance of others: and persons who have not a large portion of this world's goods, may be able to devote a small sum for this purpose, which, by the divine blessing, may turn to good account.

Will it be objected by some reader: "I do not think the distribution of religious tracts will do any good?" Consider friend, here is an evident tendency to do good. That you must allow: and where there is a tendency, we ought to employ the means, applying to, and depending upon God for his blessing. But even granting that no good should be done, your labour is not lost. God is honoured by your pious endeavours to promote his glory. You enjoy likewise the pleasing consciousness of having aimed at the salvation of immortal souls: and if a cup of cold water given to a disciple of Christ in the name of a disciple shall in no wise lose its reward, an attempt to advance
the

the kingdom of the Redeemer will not be forgotten by him, nor overlooked in that day when he maketh up his jewels.

But your labour cannot be altogether in vain: there are effects which though they fall short of the sinner's salvation, are far from being unimportant to him, or to the world. Though the truth do not convert his soul, it withholds him both from vices and from crimes. He is not rendered truly virtuous; but he is much less vicious than he would otherwise be. In the present state of society, when wickedness stalks abroad in every form with a brazen front; to take away from the mass of vice, though but a small portion and to add to the sum of virtue but a single grain, will, by the philosopher and the moralist, be neither overlooked nor despised.

But there is reason to hope that still higher and nobler ends may be attained; and that many may be hereby led to the saving knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. Survey for a moment, in the case of an individual, the blessings you have conveyed. The man is by reading your tract made wiser than if you had taught him all science, and richer and happier than if you had given him a world. He follows Jesus, and shines as a light on the earth. His children are trained up in the fear of God; and his family is the abode of sanctity and love. He is a blessing to all around; and endeavours, both by his example and his instruction, to bring his neighbours and his friends to an acquaintance with the Saviour. Those who are yet unborn will have reason to call him blessed, and to thank the christian who put the chosen tract into his hand,

The pleasures of success will unspeakably surpass what the world's Epicures find in the sweetest draughts from the most delicious fountains of sensual delight. Should heaven by its divine influences render the portion of sacred truth contained in a tract you handed to an humble traveller as you passed along the road, the power of God to his salvation:

vation: and should you afterwards meet him and hear with astonishment the forgotten stranger say, "I shall have reason eternally to bless you, sir, for your present: It has saved my soul:" Princes might envy your feelings, and beg a share of your joys. Should you not hear of it on earth, if when you are in heaven, one of its glorious inhabitants should approach you with looks of gratitude, and say, "To you, my dear friend, under God, I owe this bright, eternal crown: That memorable day when you put the little book into my hand, though forgotten by you, will never be erased from my mind. Through the grace of Jesus, it made me wise unto salvation:" Who shall attempt to express, in the language of mortal men, the raptures of your soul! Such words must be sweeter than the music of heaven to the ear. Let not these be considered as improbable suppositions: they may be realized to many of the members of the *Religious Tract Society*. With what ardour should the thought inspire the disciples of Jesus! The very possibility should make every one afraid of neglecting to enrol his name among the friends of this institution, and to become a sower of the precious seed of heavenly truth,



LONDON:

Printed for the RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY, and sold by T. WILLIAMS, at their Depository, Stationer's Court, Ludgate Hill, where Communications (post paid) will be received; and Orders (for ready money) executed to any part of the Kingdom.

Sold also by all Bookfellers, Newsmen and Hawkers. 1799.

Price ONE PENNY, or 5s. 6d. per hundred.